



SUPERIOR COURT OF
CALIFORNIA,
COUNTY OF PLACER



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
OF THE COURTS

OFFICE OF COURT CONSTRUCTION
AND MANAGEMENT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS PLACER-NEW TAHOE AREA COURTHOUSE

1. Who owns the existing North Tahoe Area Courthouse?

The existing courthouse is owned by the County of Placer. The Superior Court of Placer County occupies a portion of this space by agreement, but is an organization within the State of California's judicial branch.

2. Who is the AOC and why are they managing the new North Tahoe courthouse project?

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is the staff arm of the Judicial Council of California. The Judicial Council is the policymaking body for the California court system, including the trial courts, known as "Superior Courts," based in each county. Among other responsibilities, the AOC is responsible for planning, acquisition, design, and construction of court facilities. The new courthouse will be owned by the judicial branch.

3. Why is a new courthouse needed?

The current courthouse does not meet modern operational and security requirements. The building is not up to current seismic standards. It also does not meet current security standards, as it lacks security screening and in-custody defendants must walk past the public areas in the courtroom. The courtroom occupies approximately 525 square feet and has no jury box. Seating a jury is very challenging and inconvenient. There is no space to assemble jurors, so juries are assembled in the hallway. The building is not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, and its aged systems inadequately heat the building in winter and cool it in summer.

4. How big a courthouse is being planned?

The state's initial feasibility review of the project included a preliminary space plan based on current state standards and the operational needs of the Court. This preliminary space plan estimated a need for nearly 15,000 square feet. This would include one full-size courtroom, separate circulation for in-custody defendants, staff and the public, secure holding areas, and adequate space for jury assembly, a deliberation room, a self-help center, family court mediation, a children's waiting room, and attorney-client meeting rooms. The project also estimated the need for 45 parking spaces for the public and staff.

However, the project team is taking a second look at the building's size as well as the initial cost estimates. After the selected architectural and engineering team—Williams+Paddon—is

under contract, the space program for a new courthouse will be validated; and efforts will be made to either develop a smaller building plan or determine if the existing building plan can be accomplished less expensively.

5. Is renovation of the existing building being considered as an option?

This option has been considered and determined not to be feasible. The Court portion of the building is too small to renovate successfully, and expansion of the building, with the cooperation of the County as owner of the site, presents environmental concerns and is not possible within the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) land coverage regulations.

6. How did the state arrive at its budget for the project?

The AOC develops each project budget by first determining the building size, site size, and number of parking spaces. Then it provides this information to a professional cost estimating firm that creates a hard construction cost for the building and site work. To this, the AOC adds all project soft costs, which includes all costs associated with evaluating, selecting, and acquiring a site, analysis required to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act, the fee for the architecture and engineering team, geotechnical testing, project management and construction management fees, commissioning fees, and the cost of furniture, fixtures, and equipment. The AOC develops a project schedule, which provides a basis for estimating escalation to the mid-point of construction, which is then added to the project budget. This was the process used to arrive at the initial budget for this project.

As noted earlier, the project team is exploring whether the project can be completed more cost-effectively in the current plan or whether a smaller court facility would be appropriate. Once this review is completed, the AOC will review the project's scope, schedule, and budget with the state Department of Finance and the Joint Legislative Budget Committee before seeking approval by the State Public Works Board. This process is expected to take several months.

7. Why does it cost so much to build a one-courtroom courthouse?

The original construction-only budget per square foot for this project, based on its previously authorized budget, was \$747. The average for the program statewide is \$587. Courthouses are complex structures with special security needs and other features that drive the cost. They are important public buildings built to last – for the next 50 to 100 years. In addition, because single-courtroom buildings lack the economies of scale that make larger courthouses more efficient, they are generally more expensive on a square-foot basis. Geography also affects the projected cost—a courthouse in the Tahoe basin area of Placer County must be designed for the snow load, the topography affects site works costs, and weather can create delays during construction. The Tahoe basin also has a very short construction window each year, which can lead to extra costs.

As noted earlier, the AOC is examining ways to reduce the cost of the project, but the resulting impact on the project's budget isn't currently known. Any resulting savings would remain in the fund to benefit other courthouse projects.

Frequently Asked Questions: North Tahoe Area Courthouse

8. Why is money being spent on a new courthouse when there are so many other local needs and there is a state budget crisis?

This courthouse was identified by the state as being a “critical need” project based on security, accessibility, and structural considerations. The courthouse work will be funded without reliance on the state’s General Fund. The project is funded and managed by the judicial branch, which is a separate branch of state government, now independent of the County administrative structure.

9. How is the new courthouse being funded?

The courthouse will be funded from statewide increases in court user fees, authorized by Senate Bill 1407, which passed in 2008. This bill approved the issuance of up to \$5 billion in lease revenue bonds to fund this project and 40 others throughout the state, to be repaid by court fees, penalties, and assessments.

10. How is the community being kept informed of progress on the project?

Updates will be posted to the project’s web page on the California Courts website:
www.courts.ca.gov/5431.htm

Local community members can also contact a member of the Project Advisory Group.

11. How will the community have input on the project?

Members of the Project Advisory Group will be the main conduits for ongoing community input to the project, but we understand that the public may have questions about it as well. Questions about the project can be sent by email to occm@jud.ca.gov.

12. Who will design the courthouse?

The AOC’s request for qualifications for this project went out in August 2010. The AOC and the Court interviewed a short list of candidate firms. In January 2011, the architecture firm of Willaims+Paddon Architects was selected for this project. The Roseville-based firm brings expertise on civic and community buildings, education facilities, and other building types. Architectural design cannot begin until site selection and acquisition are complete.

13. Will the new courthouse be energy-efficient and sustainably designed?

Yes. All courthouse projects funded by SB 1407 are being designed to achieve a LEED Silver level as defined by the U.S. Green Building Council. This is a third-party certification program and the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high-performance “green” buildings. More information on LEED can be found here:
www.usgbc.org/DisplayPage.aspx?CategoryID=19.

14. Who decides where a new courthouse would be located?

The AOC is working closely with the Superior Court and with a Project Advisory Group that includes judges and court staff, and county government representatives and officials. The

Frequently Asked Questions: North Tahoe Area Courthouse

AOC follows a standard site selection policy and process. The process involves objectively evaluating all potential sites and selecting at least two sites that meet agreed-upon criteria for the proposed new courthouse in providing access to justice for the portion of Placer County inside the Tahoe basin, within the confines of the project's budget and schedule. The Presiding Judge will sign off on a preferred and alternate site, and the site selection must also be approved by the Administrative Director of the Courts (who heads the AOC) and the State Public Works Board. Site selection and acquisition typically take a year or more.

15. What sites are currently being considered?

The State Public Works Board (SPWB) has approved selection of two potential sites for the proposed new courthouse in North Tahoe. The two sites are:

- The Tahoe Tree site, which is the preferred site for the project. The site is bounded by East Lake Boulevard and Granlibakken Road in Tahoe City, in a commercial area near other government facilities. The single parcel is privately owned.
- The Dollar Hill site bounded by North Lake Boulevard and Lake Forest Road in Tahoe City. The site, currently two privately owned parcels, is located near the existing courthouse/sheriff's station building in a commercial area.

16. How soon will decisions about site selection be finalized?

The current schedule calls for finalizing site decisions by summer 2012.

17. What is the timeline for the project?

Funding was initially authorized in July 2010. The architect was selected in January 2011. Site selection and acquisition are scheduled to be completed by summer 2012. Based on the approved project schedule, architectural design is scheduled to be completed by fall 2013, and construction activities are scheduled to start in fall 2013 and be completed by spring of 2015. The schedule is subject to change.